



Monash University

From the Selected Works of Marcus R Wigan

Summer August, 1975

Race test: Nine Laps of the Isle of Man Production TT

marcus Ramsay Wigan



Available at: <https://works.bepress.com/mwigan/51/>

Nine laps of the Production TT

Preparation, tribulations and ultimately some satisfaction

THE ACU comes in for a fair amount of criticism in their handling of the TT, but it really ought to be appreciated that the organization of racing on the 1,000-rider scale over a 40-mile circuit is a task of quite a different order from even a normal GP on a permanent circuit. The TT is wreathed in myths, and everyone is an expert on what should be done with the TT course and organization. If more people had actually got to grips with the problems, there would be a darn sight fewer moans from ill-informed, riders, spectators—and journalists. First, it has to be appreciated that the organization of the actual racing (irrespective of class or length of ride) in the Isle of Man depends on a huge number of people co-ordinated by a long-standing organization of a primarily voluntary nature. The marshalling arrangements make a fascinating case study of effective organization reached via tradition and slow adaptation through experience rather than any basic rethinking. But it works, and works so well that very few problems arise. As long as the FIM inspector is given a thorough run-down of all the different aspects of the total TT organization, and he gains a decent understanding of the roles and efficiency of all the different parties involved, then the most likely outcome of his TT appraisal is that he will recommend that road racing be treated quite differently from track racing.

The dependence of the TT on its special course is inescapable: the number of machines which have been fully sorted out on the mainland tracks, which become clearly half-developed once they have been put to the test of the Mountain circuit, is legion. The practice week in the Isle of Man provides a high-pressure course in machine and rider appraisal and correction, if one treats it as practice and not as a series of competitions to top the leaderboard. To give one trivial example: production TZ Yamahas have a works fairing mounting comprising a pair of rubber/metal bushes on the ends of a fairing mount bar: on the mainland these very rarely fail . . . but after as little as one lap in the Island they fracture and tear. All the proprietary special Yamaha frames take care of this small deficiency in their mounting arrangements, but Yamaha have not yet done so. The works teams also used to find this, and it is damning to note that the odd works machine which finds its way to the Island unprepared for the special rigours of the course soon shows Achilles' heels unsuspected previously.

The logic of using the Mountain Circuit to test and improve road machines has at last come back into the limelight. Suzuki's tame 500 twin took off in sales when it won a 500 c.c. Production TT, and after the flush of enthusiasm which led to the Suzuki GB GP team had been accommodated at the

expense of much interest in PR, Eddie Crooks re-appeared at this year's 10-lap TT with the revamped GT750, as thoughts of tying the racing effort to the market-place surfaced once more.

The Production TT has not suffered quite so much from the squabbles over specifications that nearly killed the Thruxton "endurance" event: the blatant rule-pinching of Bultaco at the inaugural meeting resulted in Bill Smith riding a singularly racy PR bike to a near 90 m.p.h. average for a 250. This was rather excessive, and enforcement was tighter for a while, but as a three- or four-lap race really proved only a little for PR bikes, in that a supertuned machine could be expected to last comfortably, the dealers agitated for a longer race to give a genuine demonstration of PR capabilities. The continental 24 races are greatly successful because a machine capable of finishing a 24-hour race gives a great deal of latitude in the reliability/performance mix so that very standard machines have often figured remarkably high in the results. The rapid advance in race machine reliability that has been achieved over the last few years must owe at least a little to this stimulus. Certainly, production bike manufacturers regard the 24 formula as a good showcase, and we saw BMW, Laverda, Ducati, Honda, Moto Guzzi, Ossa and others have a go.

This year it was clear that a more strin-

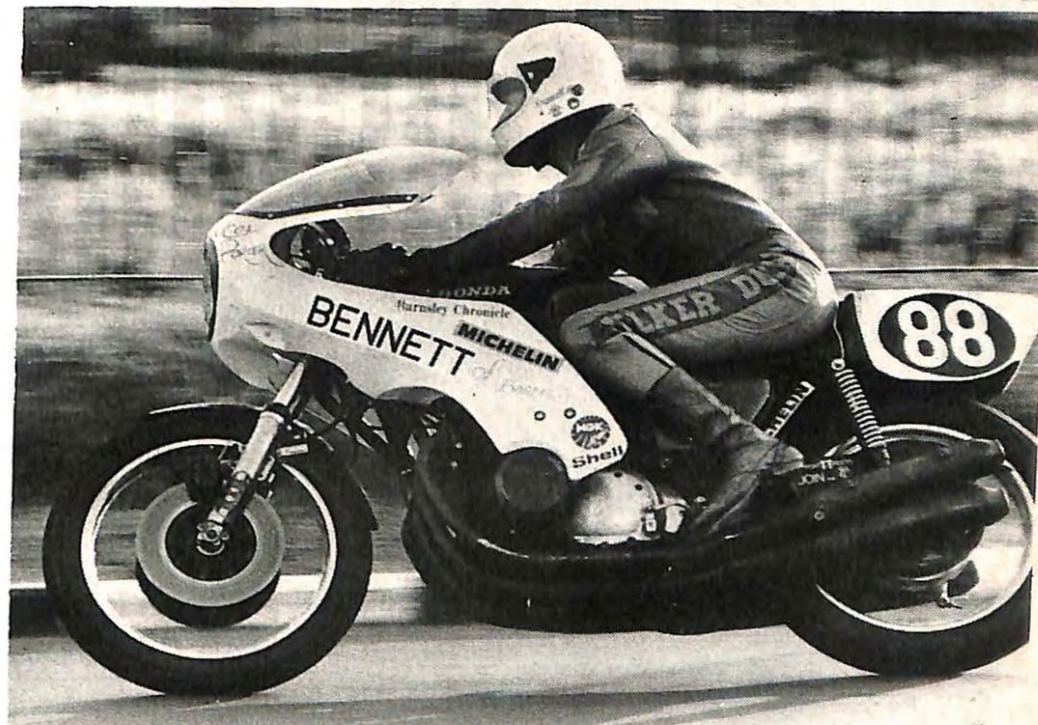
gent test of production machines would be needed to really test them and gain spectator appeal and dealer involvement. Ten laps of the TT course is a fairly good start, but as the safety aspects must always figure largely in any Isle of Man plans, two riders were required. As it turned out, 10 laps was not long enough to really decimate the field, and the handicapping system ensured that a high fraction of the finishers completed only nine laps. Obviously this suggests that a 12-lap race would be needed to put this special event on a good footing, but when I saw the plans for the meeting it was enough for me to break the habit of several years standing of ignoring the TT in favour of the more enjoyable and civilized Manx GP. As I realized that I had enough points for the necessary International Licence, this could be as a participant rather than merely as a spectator.

But what machine should I ride? My RD250 Yamaha had done its bit in securing me the SSSRC 250 Production title without any form of tuning, and had gone to a Scots-based friend of mine, or it would have been used. The 250s had a very good handicap for this race: a handicap which looked better and better as one moved down from the front of the field. The 500 class was badly treated, and the 750 class looked the most likely. The Ducati 750 has always appealed to me, and I was so close to buying one last year that only at the last minute did I resolve to get a long wheelbase R75/5 instead, as the Ducati was just too badly finished for words at the time. Mick Walker was building up his stocks of Ducati spares in a big way, and so the 750 Desmo that he had sponsored Mick James on was up for sale. After I saw the machine, and agreeing terms, the Ducati won this time (the competition being a TZ250 on this occasion), and was run on the road for some time, with a couple of race meetings for familiarization before the Island. Mick took the engine back for a complete check before the TT, and, finally the machine was ready at my home. The only non-standard parts fitted was a pair of exhaust pipes bent to give a greater degree of ground clearance to the standard silencers. Dunlop racing tyres were replaced with Michelins as an experiment, and—as a last piece of fine tuning—the tax disc, registration plates and rear light were removed.

My co-rider was to be Peter Crew, who had gained a silver replica in the last TT on Keith Manning's CB500 Honda: a safe, fast, and experienced rider with a number of Manx GP races behind him.

Mick Walker entered us in the Production race, and we also gathered further invaluable aid from my dentist. The reason for this aid sheds some light on the jaundiced view of the ACU so often held by riders. Shortly after the ACU had dismissed one of their most efficient and best regarded staff members (Mary Driver), they had put together a set of regulations for the Production TT which really failed to get any sort of overall appraisal. Not only were the early morning practices omitted, but the Saturday morning session was stated to be only a spare time which might not be used at all. The regulations further stated that the classes would practise in segregated time slots.

This year it was clear that a more stringent test of production machines would be needed . . . ten laps is a fairly good start, but as it turned out that was not enough to decimate the field. This suggests that a 12-lap race would be required to put this special event on to a good footing



After the Ducati crash: on the Bennetts of Barnsley CB750

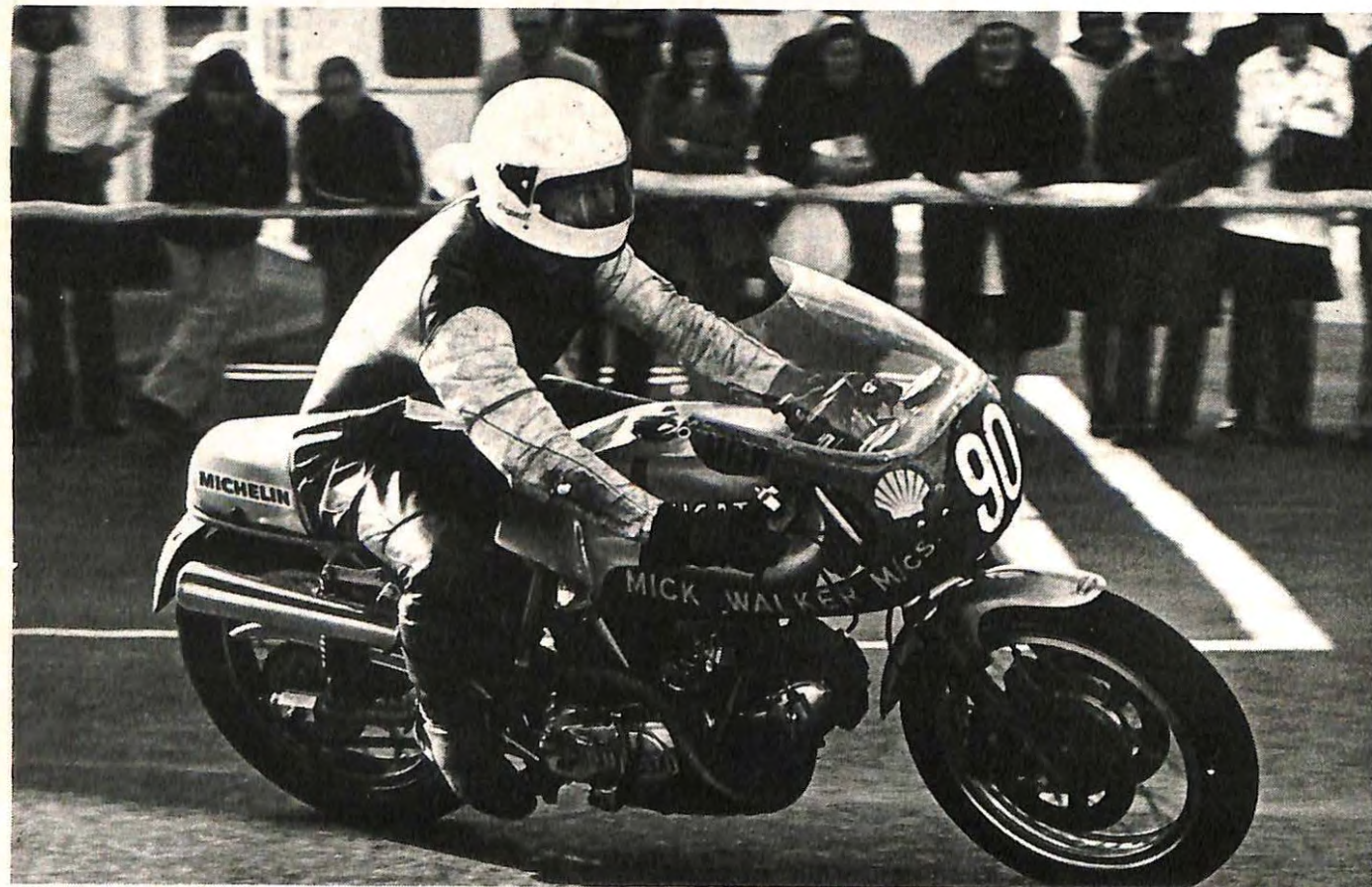
thereby sharply reducing the remaining time available for qualifying. To cap it all, newcomers to the TT were stated to have to cover eight laps in practice.

A few microseconds spent considering these facts lead one to the (correct) conclusion that a two-man team of even one newcomer could not qualify. Period. You might now perhaps begin to understand the less than enthusiastic support for some aspects of ACU organization on behalf of the actual competitors.

Obviously, as Peter and I were competing only in the PR race, we would have to find another Desmo Ducati from somewhere, and both of us go out simultaneously on every session . . . then we could actually qualify to start. A month or so before the TT, I rang the ACU to confirm that this was acceptable, as there would now be two '90s out at once. OK, said Belgrave Square, so then I started to look for a Desmo. To my surprise and gratitude George Read Ward offered to lend us his road bike for practice, and we would let him have it back set up for racing. The week before the TT we both spent drilling holes and wiring up: one to each bike. We left the road Metzler C7s on George's bike as they were V-rated and of a racing profile. Shell SR oil went into the sumps of both bikes, and we staggered off to the Island in the Thames with two Desmos and four people crammed in.

As we passed through Birmingham at Sunday midday, we were waved down by a gaggle of motorcycle police, who did the tyre kicking and light checking bit, and having failed to find anything to mark down on the van, turned "off duty" and asked us about the Desmos. It seemed probable that the bikes were the cause of our halting . . .

When we got to Liverpool in very good time for the boat on which we were booked, the quay was deserted but for a couple of German vans. It was only then that we discovered that the Isle of Man Steam Packet Company had done it again. The boat on which we were booked did not exist, and all the other people were also caught by the same bloomer. The reason was simple. Unlike any other form of transport company, the IOMSPC record only the date of sailing on their tickets, and not the date of loading as well, if it is different. As our loading time had been confirmed previously as 23.30 on Sunday, we were rather put out to find that it should have read: "Loading Saturday, sailing Sunday". Be warned, and check very carefully if you get a bridging booking. True to form, the IOMSPC took no responsibility for their confirmed error, and as they had no one on duty to log us in to their reserve loading list for the boat, we were counted as 15th when we got back to the stage after a bed and breakfast stopover. Still, we got on. The irony of all this was that the Steam Packet Co. had donated a substantial sum to be distributed to the riders with the ACU



The writer on his desmodromic Ducati in practice. "It was through Laurel Bank that I began to appreciate the torque and the good handling . . ."

It was then that we discovered the Isle of Man Steam Packet Co. had done it again . . .

start money. If only they would put their support in a slightly different manner, it might cost them less, and get them infinitely better publicity. All they have to do is to hold a proportion of the space on the sailings before the race practice week and at the end of the race week for riders. This would mean that when (and if) the ACU sends back an acceptance only four weeks or so beforehand, it is still possible actually to get to and from the Island! There is no danger whatever that the spaces would not go, even if they were not all taken up by riders. If this simple measure were to be adopted it would also be possible for a limited degree of priority loading for riders in the case of scrambled boats, too.

We finally got to the Island with about enough time to get out in practice, and set about the chores to do this. First you have to sign on, and get your helmet approved and affixed with a sticker. Then you have to take out Road Traffic Act cover to insure you for the odd piece of riding that you might have to do after the roads open. As both bikes that we had were ordinary road machines, taxed and insured, this was already dealt with. Then we got our numbers, and sorted out the numbers problem. Obviously four weeks was far too long, as the problem was faced anew when it was put to the officials. The agreement was that we would use "99" on George's bike, and put it in the name of Peter Crew, who would normally ride it. The irritation of switching numbers each time we switched bikes was soon cured. Mrs. Mary Armes appeared and volunteered her services to the ACU, and quickly acquired strips of white and green ribbon, to identify first and second drivers in a team. That solved that one. The two bikes were now distinguishable, and the riders were clearly marked in addition. We then found out that Geoff Barry and others had (*mirabile dictu*), managed to get the practice sessions opened up so that there was some faint chance of adequate practice for solo riders. To him and others: many thanks.

My Desmo had Shell SR oil in that had done two short circuit meetings in mileage, and we had been told that Shell would be in the Island with oil. Something stopped me draining it before we came, just in case . . . and the last seven pints of SR had been put into George's machine. Fortunate . . . as Shell didn't make it until late on Tuesday afternoon, with their own problems holding them up.

Both bikes had been fitted with Champion L3G plugs: a set that seems to really suit the Desmo. My Desmo had new Michelin tyres on: M45 on the rear and S41 on the

front: 4.00 and 3.50 H18 respectively. I went for tyre pressure advice to the Michelin tent, and had 32 p.s.i./36 p.s.i. put in, with positive advice to leave the settings strictly alone. Later in the week I found out why.

In to scrutineering, and with the false confidence of one who has checked everything. I was quite horrified to see one clip-on move slightly when leant on by the scrutineer. It wasn't even Jack Harding of the heavy mitt . . . Stuck up at the start, all our tools were a mile away. Fortunately the ever-cheerful and helpful Charlie Williams appeared with a suitable size of Allen key, and all was then well. Instants later the gate at the end of the paddock opened, and a swarm of machines went on up to the line. I was about fifth to "push off" with the engine running and the clutch out, as a real push of the Desmo is both backbreaking and not invariably successful either. The tank was absolutely full, and as I went across St. Ninians it made itself felt. Going down Bray Hill it was totally stable until it hit the bottom, when it twisted about in a most un-Ducati-like manner. After the usual two wheelies up the hill, I went steadily into Quarter Bridge, only to find that unless I braked rather smoothly and with far less than full power, the bike was trying to tie itself in a knot. Tyres? Weight distribution? Wheel alignment? Pressures? Dampers? No matter, there were 37 miles to go before I was going to try to decide. On the fast sections down to Ballacraine it was remarkable how smoothly the Desmo was running. All my little hates on the way seemed to be less troublesome than usual, and each corner turned up just as I expected. After some years, it was clear that the Island was beginning to fall into place in my mind. A slight weave set in at top speed in a straight line—a phenomenon that I had not observed with Dunlop tyres fitted the previous week. On braking, however, the Michelins seemed to inspire more confidence at the point where a Dunlop is on the transition of the triangular section.

It was through Laurel Bank that I began to appreciate the torque and the good handling provided by the Ducati. Although I was still letting the tyres wear in, and myself become accustomed to the circuit, the bike, and the tyres, I found that I was travelling through the bends considerably quicker than usual. At Creg Willys and Sarah's Cottage I took it very easy (or so I thought), but still my toes just brushed the ground as I stuck them out to check how far over I was. The torque took me a little by surprise, and I arrived at the little right-left bend after Sarah's as quickly as I ever have on a Yamaha. Crouk-y-Voddy was really bumpy, but all I had to do was hang on: the Ducati tracked true at close to top speed. After the drop right to the 11th Milestone, Handley's Bend came up very fast, and going a bit slower than I thought I needed to, I found that the Ducati was not as good at rapid changes of direction as I had hoped. Plenty of room, though. The top of Barregaroo loomed up, and until I could really get the line right, I dropped a gear. The same went for the bottom, at least for this lap. Sulby straight was just too bumpy for me, and I could not hold it on full bore. There was one notch softer to go on the preload of

the rear units. I'd use it next lap. The Mountain climb was never so easy before. The torque of the V-twin really demolished the rise and the engine pulled as high r.p.m. up the Mountain as it had done on the flat. It was on the downward slope to Creg ny Baa that the braking wiggle turned up again and it simply refused to go away.

When I tried to negotiate Governor's Bridge it became clear the steering damper was far, far too hard, and was inducing waddles.

On the second lap a plug chop showed that the mixture was not ideal, and that one plug was in a bad way due to a long warm up and tickover before the start. A new pair went in at Appledene, and I went round to finish the lap. Peter had pulled in after one lap, with a vibrating engine which was clearly too lean. I discovered there was time for another lap, and went off on a short lap that turned out to be 26m 12s (86.6 m.p.h.): the waddle was still there, and the

*On the Honda.
"Having re-educated
myself to right-hand
gearchanging, the
left-hand change was
disconcerting . . . but
the four certainly had
a lot of speed"*

ease with which the bike was going augured well for the week ahead.

Next day we changed fork oils, realigned wheels, removed the steering damper and re-jetted both bikes. Tellus 24 was used in my machine for the front forks, but as there was no sign of Shell, the oil stayed in. When Shell arrived, it turned out that SR is good for 300 or so racing miles, so we were still o.k. One lap each on the same bikes as last night, and then we would switch so that Peter could get to grips with the race bike. Both of us were happy with our single laps: Peter did 88 and I 86, and we traded machines. On the Sulby Straight Peter had come past me on George's machine as I leapt from crag to crag. On my machine Peter got down to it after a first lap at about 89, and was clearly expecting a considerable improvement in ground clearance from the raised pipes on my machine. This is justified on the left-hand side, but on the right the improvement is

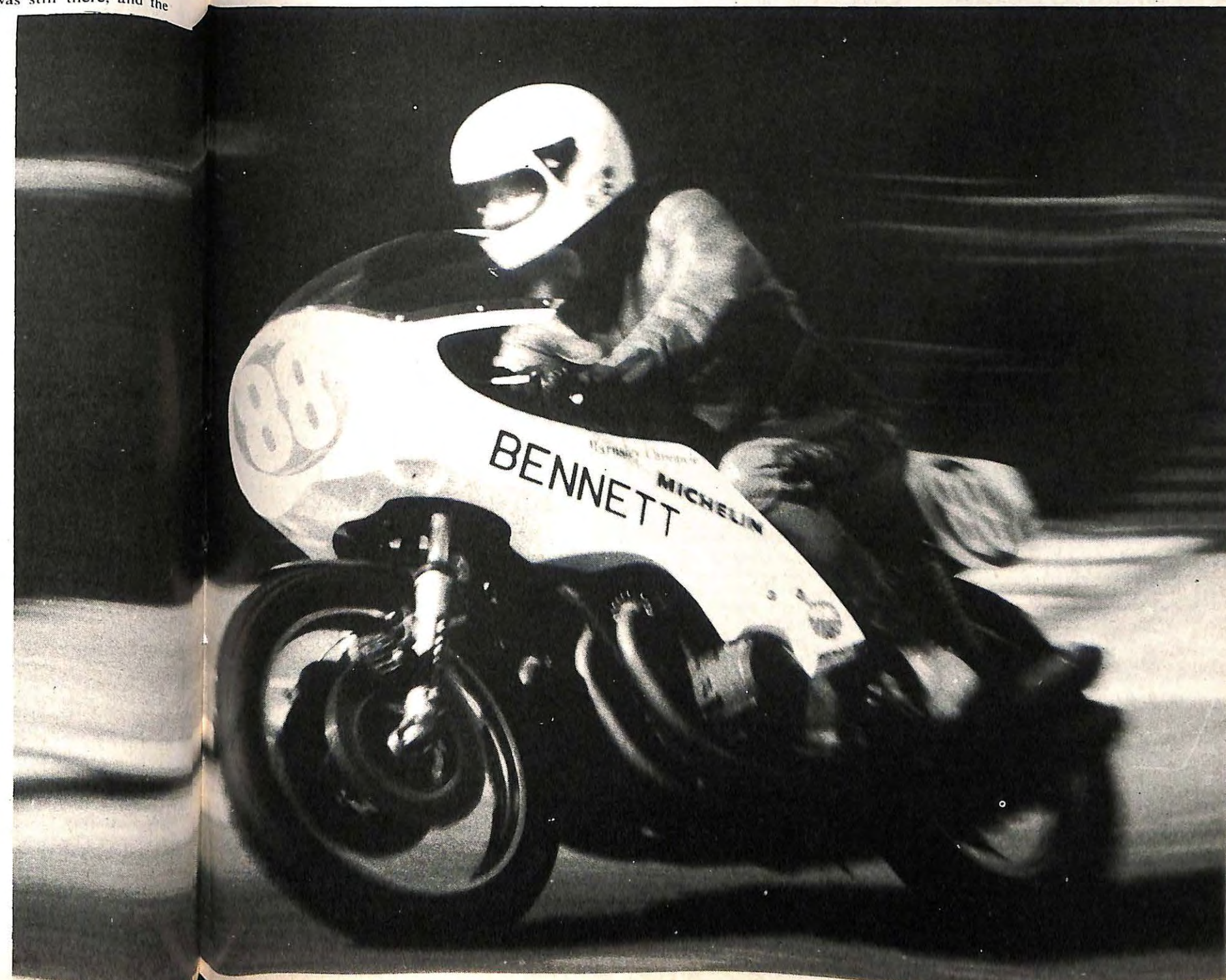
rather smaller: as he went into Sarah's Cottage on his second lap, with evident elan, the kickstart spline dug in, and he clouted the bank head-on at speed, doing both himself and the machine a substantial amount of damage. After a worrying report of a broken pelvis, it turned out that it was just heavy bruising. By the end of the week Peter was walking about with the conviction that his legs might function properly very shortly. They have since.

I trundled round on George's bike, mindful of the road Metzlers and the low pipes, and completed the lap at 86 again, noting that George's bike did not snake as much under braking, and was more comfortable to ride with low pipes, as one could tuck right in. This meant that I could take Sulby flat out, and gave me the clue as to how Peter had gone by me earlier.

All I could do now was complete the sorting out of George's bike for his racing later in the year. A couple of slow laps on

the Wednesday, when I stopped a couple of times on each lap, confirmed the suspension settings, and also proved that the oil being blown out of the breather was due merely to overfilling and not to the bane of Desmos—broken rings. His bike was pulling 185 to 200 k.p.h. on occasions on 40-t rear sprocket: mine was doing 195 to 200 and a little over sometimes on a 41-t (r.p.m. 7,800 and 8,300 respectively).

For the Thursday session we fitted new Michelins on front and rear, and watched the Michelin fitters balancing the wheels with a deft speed that never fails to evade me when I try to do it in a hurry. The tyres were set to pressure before fitting, when they were put on the rims. A new Renold special strength racing chain went on. However, I missed the tyre check, as I thought that the pressures would be o.k. As it turned out, there had been a misunderstanding when the tyres were done, and the front had been carefully set to 30 p.s.i. instead of 32. I





"Well, you see, it happened this way . . ." M.R.W. puts over a point at the pits didn't find out about this until the Waterworks. The first lap was just running in the tyres and the chain, with no tremendous hurry as I wasn't going to take it out again anyway, once settled in. However, as so often happens when you let the bike make the pace without pressure, I found that I was passing a lot of machines including 250 Yahas on occasion. When I got to Ramsay hairpin the bike seemed to understeer a lot, and as the next gear went in and it shot up the hill the front wheel lofted as usual and gave a shake (as it had on all the other laps too) . . . but this time it did NOT bite when it came down again: the front wheel slithered across the road and the back started to follow it. The re-entrant kerb at the entrance to the Waterworks approached at a horrid speed as I balanced the bike in

its now slowing drift into the side, slowly losing speed, but still—necessarily—laid well over. Finally, the balance of speed, angle and adhesion at front and rear matched, and both tyres bit a foot from the kerb, when travelling a lot slower than I had been at the start of the event. After this moment I took it rather more coolly, and, while continuing to use only a mild degree of lean, reduced the amount of acceleration used as well. I couldn't help being reminded of Peter's crash on my bike on an uphill section, where the torque had probably caught him out too. At the end of the lap I stopped, checked the plugs and also the tyres. The plugs were o.k., but the tyres were not. Two p.s.i. more went in, and I was reprimanded for missing the tyre pressure check. That lap turned out to be 88.5 m.p.h., and the second over a mile an hour faster,

At least we had finished, after 4 hours 15 minutes and a few seconds of the Island course

but as the handling was back in full measure, it took little effort to achieve. It was singularly sad that I could not race this bike: clearly a race average of about 90 or a bit over was on.

After some urging, I put up a note in the race office asking if anyone wanted a second rider. As the game of musical chairs had gone on for most of the week, there was some chance that a ride could turn up. And so it did. Colin Porter, riding the Bennetts of Barnsley Honda 750, had waited all week for his partner, Bob Brown, to turn up. No sign of him even on the Thursday evening, and Colin himself needed another lap to qualify. On the Friday evening he went out for his last lap, and then I took over to qualify on it myself.

Having re-educated myself to right-hand gearchanging, the left-hand gearchange was disconcerting. What was even more alarming was the up-for-up action and the sloppy action. Both in direct opposition to the Ducati. The first thing I noticed was the lack of torque, and the next was the wooden action of the double discs. Just like my own CB750 with standard linings in, before trying out Ferodo materials. I was correct, standard linings were fitted. The gearchange gave me food for thought at every turn, and for a full lap I counted three before any gearchange sequence. The handling of the Honda was not as good as the Ducati, nor was the steering. I had to contend with wobbles that I had never known on the V-twin, and the acclimatization process showed in my lap times. First 28 minutes (81), then 27 (84), and I stopped.

"Don't worry about the wobbles, just keep it turned on. It's a road M45 Michelin on for now, race compound for the race tomorrow. There's time for another lap . . . it will do over four laps on a full five-gallon tank. How about it?" Paul Bennet clearly knew how to put a CB750 together, and the Bennett of Barnsley Honda certainly had a lot of speed.

Out I went again. It felt a lot more familiar now. Came back in to stop at 26 (86), with confidence that there was a good bit still to come for the race.

Out came the wheels, and Michelins went on. In the morning the wheels went back in, and a set of new clutch plates arrived with messenger Steve. Now our troubles began. We had to weigh in at 11, and when checking over the machine 30 minutes before it was clear that the oil had to be changed, the chain had to be changed, and the clutch had to be fitted with new plates. All went smoothly until the clutch went funny on us when we tried to reassemble it with a few minutes to spare. Rapid rushings about

got us an extension, and after a lot of fiddling I rediscovered the blindingly obvious and screwed it up very quickly. Time was running out fast as we wheeled it up to Renolds. Then the problems began again. Colin had been using DID chain, and had DID stickers on the machine. During the week he had asked for some help to fit the spare continuous DID chain to his machine, and the Renolds men had tried, but could not break the links. Consequently a new Renold had to be used, and not surprisingly Renold stickers too . . . after a slightly distressing five minutes the job was done and Renold stickers went on the forks . . . and we went into scrutineering at the last gasp.

There was only a few hours before we were on again, and all the bikes were lined up in an impressive array in the warming-up area, basking in the sun. At the hour mark a number of people rushed up to get at their machines. Rather later, most of the rest appeared. A few with basically very standard machines who had little to worry about. Tom Newell's ZIB had its first new plugs, and the odometer sat below 500 miles . . . the CB400s of the *Motor Cycle* team sat and glinted, and a number of others were causing their riders a little concern at this stage. We checked our pit. Fuel in filler O.K. Fuel in both 5-gallon drums O.K. Filler nozzle operates. O.K.

Warming-up

Then came the warming-up period, which was much more bearable than a Yamaha screech-in. Finally the bikes were all lined up, and the 250s went off very quietly to their head start. More waiting. Then the 500s went away, with a certain defensive air of "we haven't a chance—so we are going to go from the start". It sounded like it, and the muted tones of silenced 10,000 r.p.m. Hondas droned away, awash with the crackle of open-pipe versions. Funnily enough, the open-pipe machines were actually slower than the silenced ones. There is a lesson in this somewhere for FIM/ACU—and the noisier breed of road rider.

Finally, the 750s were readied. Chris Mehew beside me looked at his valve spring Ducati—"It's not fast, but its lovely to ride"—and then they were off. This time the noise was considerable, and that fine imitation "Production" bike Sam went off at a rate of knots. Let me see: Sam has been around winning or not for six years now, and only a week or so ago we get the latest Triumphs with "new frame . . . just like Sam's". At least Sam has silencers and a standard tank. Why not own up? Production racing really means (and perhaps SHOULD mean) it looks almost standard.

You all know how the race was won. Sam again (pause by all, and then occasional afterthought . . . Presumably the riders had a little to do with it?).

You will also know that the 250s and Sam were neck and neck, and that the 500s were never in the hunt. Let's run it backwards. If you look at last year's winning speeds, you get precisely the handicapping system adopted.

So the 500s really have only a minute to complain about. But now look at the spread within each class last year, the spread between first and sixth finisher. Then you see

that the 250s are very closely matched, the 500s almost the same—but the 750s are widely dispersed.

Now can you predict the finishing results? Sam (Production racer) first, a slew of 250s in the first 20, a 500 out of even the first ten after record speeds—and a tail which is mainly 750s and 500s. Right? Right.

Have another look: The spread of finishing times is pretty close for 10 laps, and the retirement rate extremely low for such a long race: 54 finishers is not all that common for a six-lap race, let alone a 10-lapper.

Our race was started by Colin, who had the very bad luck to get brought off by spilled petrol at Quarter Bridge. Martin Russell fell off his Rocket 3, and Colin slid off on the resultant spill.

The fairing was squashed into the steering damper, which was probably damaged to boot. After a couple of minutes of bashing the bits about, Colin pushed off again, and after a slow lap round with the fairing rubbing the steering damper, this was cured at the pits. Two more laps and I would be on. When the time came we checked the chain, and sprayed it with the special lubricant aerosol that Renolds were selling to ensure that the chains lasted. They had also brought out a much stronger chain for this event, as the thrashing given to chains in the Isle of Man had really given them cause for concern. The Renolds men were up and down the front of the pits keeping a sharp eye on the rates of wear. Most of the competitors had been thoroughly educated, and a number readjusted the spindle position at some point in the race. Many were OK, and had suffered no excessive stretching. Colin's machine was one of them, which was just as well, with the amount of time we had lost. When I took the machine over with a brimful tank, the shouted warning was—"Take it easy until you get used to it". I read this as a warning that the handling was a bit under par, and rapidly confirmed this by the time that I had wobbled round Quarter Bridge and Braddan.

I remembered what Hugh Evans had said to do: if it wobbles just turn it on—that bike is fast. So I tried it. Once. After that I was not so bold. The occasion was the first run up Cronk-y-Voddy, when the wobbles were sufficiently alarming that I had to try a number of drastic expedients to get the wobbles sufficiently under control to peel off at the end of the straight. Our man BP confirmed later that it looked quite as bad as it felt. As the tank level dropped, the handling improved, and I began to notice that the twin discs were rather short on power as I came down the Mountain, and everything warmed up thoroughly.

Coming in at the end of lap six, the oil tank was topped up, and Colin disappeared at a great rate. The last four laps were to be done on the single tankful, and after two laps I took over again. My new leathers had arrived just in time for the race, and attracted a number of ribald comments from several people: I mention it now because the leather had only just started to break in on this last session. With the low fuel level and with easier leathers I felt far happier, and my lap speed rose very sharply. Coming down the Mountain for the last time Roger Cope on an RD250 was crawling, under the

paint with great success, and had clearly decided that brakes were superfluous. A 10th lap was not to be, and we were waved into the paddock.

The Honda was in excellent spirits: the hastily rebuilt clutch had not slipped or dragged, and was still in adjustment. Only the battery seemed a bit down. The tyres were in good condition too. Lots of oil in the tank. But at least we had finished, albeit at the pedestrian overall average of 84.25: 4 hrs. 15 minutes and a few seconds of the Island course.

On the occasions when the track was smooth and the prevailing stiff wind was not too gusty, the Honda had really got going quickly. The 9,300 r.p.m. reading through the speed trap gave 126 m.p.h. for that lap, and I repeated it later on. The Honda had only a Hadleigh-supplied camshaft, alloy valve caps, and the usual juggled ratios to give a closer-ratio gearbox: a fairly modest set of alterations.

We had finally caught up with the rest, but had made no progress from our lowly position in the field, finishing 53rd of the 79 starters, and 54 finishers.

The Ducatis had done reasonably well: Doug Lunn/Doug Cash in 15th place, Charlie Sanby and Dave Mason in 20th, and the two Sports Motorcycles machines in 26/27th. Eric Hayes and Chris Mehew were 1 m.p.h. ahead of us in 47th place with their valve-spring 750 Sport. The BMWs had done better, and secured 7th, 21st and 30th places.

Weasel-wording

The finishing fraction was very high for a TT of any length, and it was with frank disbelief that we received the announcement that the weasel-wording in the Regs allowed the ACU to avoid giving so much as an initialled postcard to anyone who finished lower than 20th overall. Of all the misplaced "economies" that the ACU could dream up, this year's parsimony with replicas and finishing awards must be the least excusable idiocy. Still, they got so much of the rest right that it wouldn't seem the same somehow without a few blunders in dealing with the riders. PR has never been the ACU's best activity, and now that they use a professional on occasions, perhaps his advice might actually be sought?

No doubt all will be ironed out next year, and an extra lap or two grafted on, to boot. The new brand of Production TT has a real future. The Shell men had a vastly gruelling task to set up all the pits, and a complete arcade behind the pits had been cordoned off to ensure safety with such large quantities of petrol floating about: the fuel side went off beautifully too, and the Renolds men were far happier at the end of the race than they had looked at the beginning. The weather had been kind, and the handicapping pretty accurate, bearing in mind that it had to contend with a "production bike" of the nature of Slippery Sam, as well as the production machines that were equally legal, and a little closer to the spirit of the class.

Just insist on silencers for all, and both noise level and spectator identification will improve further. A brave and successful first try, ACU.

M.R.W.